FAMILY PRAYER not to be neglected.

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A

DISCOURSE,

WHEREIN IS OPENED,

The NATURE of PRAYER in general,

AND

The Warrant for *Family Prayer* in particular:

WITH

Anſwers to ſundry Excuſes for the Neglect thereof:

AND

ADDRESSES to ſeveral Sorts of Perſons.

By ISAAC BACKUS,

PASTOR of a CHURCH in MIDDLEBOROUGH.

Let my Prayer be ſet forth before thee as Incenſe; and the lifting up of my Hands, as the Evening Sacrifice.

PSALM CXLI. 2.

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To the READER.

NEW-ENGLAND has formerly been a place famous for religion in general, and for family worſhip in particular; but of late, the neglect of this, as well as of other religious duties, has evidently been growing upon us; which has cauſed much grief to pious ſouls: yet I have not heard that any diſcourſe has been publiſhed upon this ſubject here, theſe many years: And as there have lately been numbers remarkably awakened in ſome parts of the land, that were trained up in the neglect of family prayer, who are ſtill at a loſs about the ſcripture authority for the daily practice thereof: Therefore the following conſiderations, by the advice of friends, are humbly offered to the public.

FEBRUARY 6, 1766.

Family Prayer not to be neglected.

A DISCOURSE, &c.

1 PETER, III. 7.

----That your Prayers be not hindred.

THE inſpired author of this epiſtle, having ſpoken of the *living ſtone*, which is *diſallowed indeed of men, but choſen of God, and precious*; on whom the ſaints, *as living ſtones, are built up a ſpiritual houſe*: and having ſhewn that tho' many ſtumbled, and took offence at this glorious rock, yet that he is precious to believers, who are a *peculiar people*; *that they ſhould ſhew forth the praiſes of him who hath called them out of darkneſs into his marvellous light*: He then proceeds to lay down many inſtructions and exhortations concerning a right behaviour in their ſeveral circumſtances and relations; and among the reſt, he ſpeaks particularly to huſbands and wives, concerning how they ought to act towards each other; and gives this as a weighty conſideration to move them to a right walk together, namely, *That your prayers be*

not

not hindered: As if he had ſaid, 'You are to maintain a conſtant trade of *coming* to that *living ſtone*, and as you are heads of a family, you are daily to practice ſocial worſhip: But if relative duties are neglected, and the adverſary can prevail to make a breach between you, that will have a dreadful tendency to hinder your daily united prayers.' For, that *family prayer* is here intended, I think is plain from this conſideration, viz. Injurious treatment, even from near friends, is ſo far from hindering pious ſouls from *perſonal* addreſſes to the throne of grace, that it often makes them more forward and earneſt therein. In the prophet *Micah*'s time, when corruption had ſo far prevailed, that no faithful friend was to be ſeen, and the caution is given, *Keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy boſom*; and when *a man's enemies* were *the men of his own houſe*, then he ſays, *Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my ſalvation: My God will hear me.* Micah vii. 5—7. Thus you may ſee that the ill behaviour of wife or family may excite, inſtead of hindering ſecret prayer. (*David* ſays, *For my love, they are my adverſaries: But I give myſelf unto prayer.* Pſal. cix 4.) But there muſt be agreement in order for ſocial worſhip: From whence it appears plain that family prayer is here intended; which I ſhall attempt to ſay ſomething farther upon, in the following manner:

I. I ſhall endeavour to open ſomething of the nature of prayer in general.

II. Produce ſome ſcripture evidences for the daily practice of family prayer in particular.

III. Labour to remove ſome hinderances that ſeem

ſeem to lie in the way of this duty: And then cloſe with addreſſes to ſeveral ſorts of perſons.

I. I ſhall endeavour to open ſomething of the nature of prayer in general.

And I conceive that prayer is the ſoul's approach to God through a glorious Mediator, by the aſſiſtance of the Holy Spirit, to preſent our ſupplications, praiſes, &c. unto him. David calls it a *pouring out our hearts before him.* Pſal. lxii. 8. Which may be conſidered as comprehending the ſoul's expreſſing its views of him, its regards to him, its deſires of help from him, and its returns of gratitude for favours received. Here obſerve, it is *heart exerciſe.* Many draw near with their mouths, while their hearts are far from God: But the prophet ſays, *With my ſoul have I deſired thee in the night; yea, with my ſpirit within me will I ſeek thee early.* Iſai. xxvi. 9. And in true prayer, the heart is *poured out*; the inmoſt griefs, burdens and deſires of the ſoul are laid open before God: Sins are confeſſed, wants and miſeries are preſented, help is requeſted, arguments are uſed of various kinds: Petitions and requeſts are alſo brought for others, at home and abroad, in all places and relations. There is likewiſe in a right performance of this exerciſe, a ſelf dedication and ſurrender of our all unto God: As in Pſal. cxix. 94. *I am thine: Save me, for I have ſought thy precepts.* See alſo Iſai. lxiv. 8, 9. Yea, the very nature of prayer implies in it an engagement to receive and improve what favours the Lord ſhall grant, to his glory, and in a way of conformity to his will. Hence the work of praiſe is twice called by the ſweet pſalmiſt of *Iſrael*, a *paying his vows*, in Pſal. cxvi. and in Pſal. lxi. 4, 5, 8. he

ſays,

ſays, *I will truſt in the covert of thy wings, for thou, O God, haſt heard my vows.*——*So will I ſing praiſe unto thy name forever, that I may daily perform my vows.* Here take good notice, that this duty was not to be performed only once in a year, month or a week; but it was his daily exerciſe; which leads me,

II. To produce ſome ſcripture evidences for the daily practice of family prayer in particular.

And the firſt ſhall be taken from our relation to God as his children.

He is the father of all fleſh, as he gave them their exiſtence, and gives all their enjoyments: And he is the covenant-father in JeſusChriſt, to all regenerate ſouls. Now children, eſpecially little ones, as ſaints are often called, ‡ are bound both by duty and inclination very often to come to their parents: And as it is not their buſineſs to provide for themſelves, or to be anxious about their future ſupport, but to come to their parents for whatever they need; ſo it is their duty, daily to come for inſtructions about what they ſhould do, and faithfully to obſerve the ſame. And how loudly does this ſpeak forth the importance of daily prayer? Hence, as our Saviour hath informed us that our Father knows what we need; ſo he has taught us to pray after this manner, *Our Father which art in heaven.* † Which words have been very juſtly expounded as a leſſon that 'teach-'eth us to draw near to God with all holy reverence 'and confidence, as children to a father, able and 'ready to help us, and that we ſhould pray *with* and '*for* others.' And that he intended we ſhould come in

‡ Matth. xviii. 3. John xiii. 33. 1 Joh. ii. 1, 12, 13. and iv. 4. and v. 21. † Matth. vi. 9—13.

in *this manner* unto our heavenly father, *every day*, appears exceeding plain from the fourth petition, which is, *Give us* THIS DAY *our daily bread*: For as bread (take it in a natural or ſpiritual ſenſe) is what we need every day, and as it is *the living God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy*; * ſo what can we do leſs than to aſk him for what we need, and give him thanks for what we receive? Chriſt does not ſay, give us this week, or this year, but give us *this day* our *daily* bread:—And tho' the father of our ſpirits needs no information about our caſe, yet he will *be enquired of* † by us:——He will have us own our dependance on him, and our obligations to him. And as we have not only perſonal, but alſo family neceſſities and mercies, and as we are taught to ſay, *Our* father, give *us this* day *our* daily bread, I think the evidence appears very clear from hence for the daily practice of family worſhip.

2. The ſpiritual prieſthood of the ſaints will afford further evidence for this duty. Our apoſtle in chap. ii. 5, 9. calls them *a holy*, and *a royal prieſthood*: And John ſtiles them *kings and prieſts unto God*. Rev. i. 6. Now the main buſineſs of the prieſts was to miniſter in God's ſanctuary, and offer ſacrifice upon his altar. Deut. xxxiii. 10. The high prieſt was an eminent type of Jeſus Chriſt, who is now entered, not *into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itſelf, now to appear in the preſence of God for us*. Heb. ix. 24. All the *levitical* ſacrifices of atonement pointed out that *one offering*, by which he *hath perfected forever them that are ſanctified*. Heb. x. 14. He alone has anſwered for

* 1 Tim. vi. 17. † Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

for all our ſins: But their thank offerings and free-will-offerings were a figure of the gracious exerciſes of the ſaints. It is their *reaſonable ſervice* to *preſent their bodies a living ſacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.* Rom. xii. 1. And their liberality is called, *an odour of a ſweet ſmell, a ſacrifice acceptable, well-pleaſing to God.* Phil. iv. 18. Heb. xiii. 16. Tho' what comes more directly to our preſent purpoſe, is that their prayers and praiſes are ſo called. David underſtood them ſo in his day: *Let my prayer* (ſays he) *be ſet forth before thee as incenſe; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening ſacrifice.* Pſal. cxli. 2. And John ſpeaks repeatedly of *odours* and *incenſe* which came *with the prayers of the ſaints.* Rev. v. 8. and viii. 3, 4. Thoſe ſacrifices were to be preſented at God's altar, which ſanctified the gift: Hence the ſacred writer to the *Hebrews*, in explaining and improving the ſpiritual deſign of thoſe ancient ceremonies, ſays, *We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat, which ſerve the tabernacle.* Heb. xiii. 10. i. e. They that ſtill held to the ſhadow when the ſubſtance was come, by their unbelief excluded themſelves from the benefits of this glorious altar, from whence the prayers of all ſaints aſcend up before God. The inſpired penman having mentioned the place and way of coming, proceeds to our duty in relation thereto.——*By him therefore* (ſays he) *let us offer the ſacrifice of praiſe to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name.* Ver. 15.

Now as he was writing to the *Hebrews*, there is abundant reaſon to conclude that in this he has a particular reference to their *morning* and *evening ſacrifice:*

crifice: for in the firſt appointment thereof, they were told that it was what they ſhould offer upon the altar *day by day continually*; and that it ſhould be a *continual* burnt-offering throughout their generations. Exod. xxix. 38, 42. And it is afterwards called *the continual burnt offering*, no leſs than ten times in two chapters.* How clear, then, does the evidence appear, that the command to offer the ſacrifice of praiſe to God *continually*, intends that chriſtians ſhould be as conſtant in their offerings of praiſe as the *Jews* were in their morning and evening ſacrifice?

It might be farther obſerved, that the word *continually*, is repeatedly explained by *Iſaiah*, to mean the ſame as *every day*. Iſai. li. 13. and lii. 5. And it is uſed in three places in ſcripture for perſons daily diet. *David* ſaid to *Mephiboſheth*, *Thou ſhalt eat bread at my table* continually. 2 Sam. ix. 7. (See alſo 2 King. xxv. 29. Jer. lii. 33.) with which compare Pſal. lv. 17. *Evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud, and he ſhall hear my voice*: By which it appears that his addreſſes to God, were as frequent and conſtant as his ſtated meals: and that was according to the divine command in Deut. viii. 10 *When thou haſt eaten, and art full, then thou ſhalt bleſs the Lord thy God, for the good land which he hath given thee.* And the cuſtom of looking to God for a bleſſing on their food was ſo well known in *Samuel*'s time, that the *young maidens* that *Saul* and his ſervant met, could tell them concerning *Samuel*'s going up to the ſacrifice (or feaſt, as the margin reads it) that, *The people will not eat until he come, becauſe he doth bleſs the ſacrifice, and afterwards they eat that be bidden.* 1 Sam ix. 13. Which cuſtom we have ſo fully confirmed by

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* Numb. xxviii. 3, 6, 10, 15, 24, 31. and xxix. 11, 16, 19, 22.

the example of our Lord and Maſter, that we have the accounts of his practiſing of it, mentioned in no leſs than ſeven places by the evangeliſts ;* and the apoſtle *Paul* not only imitated this example of his divine maſter,‖ but alſo declares, that the meats which ſeducers would command men to abſtain from, *God hath created to be received with thankſgiving of them which believe and know the truth : for* (ſays he) *every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refuſed, if it be received with thankſgiving : for it is ſanctified by the word of God, and prayer.* 1 Tim. iv. 3—5. What can be plainer than this is to ſhew that we ought to practice prayer to God that he would *ſanctify* our food to us when we partake of it, and give thanks to him for it. Nay the language of the text plainly ſhews that we have no right to receive the good creature without *thankſgiving :* for the apoſtle holds forth that God created them for that end, namely, *to be received with thankſgiving* : and he ſays, that nothing is to be refuſed, IF *it be received with thankſgiving* : q. d. They are all God's creatures, and we have no right to any of them without leave : well they are *ſanctified by the word of God and prayer* ; i. e. the word gives us warrant to receive them in the way of prayer for a bleſſing on them, and thankſgiving for them ; and in no other way. For if we take them without this, what do we better than pilfering or robbing ; as God charged the *Jews* with doing of old, *Ye have robbed me, even this whole nation, therefore they had a curſe even on their bleſſings, becauſe they would not lay it to heart to give glory to* God's *name.* Mal. ii. 2. and iii. 9. This

* Matth. xiv. 19. and xv. 36. Mar. vi. 41. and viii. 6, 7. Luke ix. 16. John vi. 11, 23. ‖ Acts xxvii. 35.

This duty was ſo well known in the primitive times of chriſtianity, that Paul founds his argument upon it, and gives it as a good reaſon why the weak believer, who ſtill thought ſome meats to be unclean, ſhould not judge him that believed they were clean, and ſo partook of them, viz. becauſe, *he that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks.* Rom. xiv. 6. By which it is plain that he did not ſuppoſe that any believer would eat of God's good creatures without giving him thanks. To the ſame purpoſe he ſpeaks to the *Corinthians*, when he aſks, *Why am I evil ſpoken of for that for which I give thanks?* And then adds this command, *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatſoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* 1 Cor. x. 30, 31. Should any ſay, that we may give thanks in our hearts, when it is not openly expreſſed, I readily grant it; yet where a number make a meal together, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth ought to ſpeak; and they muſt have ſtrange notions indeed, who can hold that all theſe ſcripture inſtructions and examples refer only to the ſecret exerciſes of the heart!

Thus by the way I thought it proper to ſay ſomething concerning the right manner of receiving our food. Our

3. Evidence for family prayer, ſhall be drawn from ancient example. The Patriarch *Abraham*, when he was called of God out of his own country, into the land of *Canaan*; his heavenly friend firſt appeared to him in the plain of *Moreh*, and there he builded an altar to him. Then he removed to the Eaſt of *Bethel*, and there built another, *and called upon the name of the Lord.* The like he did at *Hebron*: and ſo did *Iſaac* at *Beerſheba*, and *Jacob*, both at *Shechem*,

chem, and *Bethel*.† Thus theſe three eminent fathers, as they removed from place to place, in the place where they pitched their tents, and where their families dwelt, there they erected altars, and called on the name of the Lord: which ſpeaks forth family prayer ſtrongly indeed. And that *David* did the like, ſeems to be clear from Pſal. cxli. 2. So did our Lord with his diſciples. Luk. xi. 1. Theſe are ſome of the *footſteps of the flock*, which we are directed to *go forth by*. Sol. Song. i. 8. To which we may add,

4. That many poſitive precepts, which we have in the New-Teſtament, plainly include family prayer; ſuch as that, *Pray without ceaſing: In every thing give thanks*; *for this is the will of God in Chriſt Jeſus, concerning you*. 1 Theſ. v. 17, 18. And that in Eph. vi. 18. *Praying always with all prayer and ſupplication in the ſpirit, and watching thereunto with all perſeverance, and ſupplication for all ſaints*. None will ſuppoſe that to *pray without ceaſing*, and to *pray always*, intends that we ſhould do nothing elſe but pray; yet ſurely it implies the *daily* practice thereof: And we are here expreſly required to give thanks, not only for ſome things, or upon ſome occaſions, but *in every thing*; which muſt include family favours as well as others: yea, we are commanded to pray *always* with *all prayer*; and who dare ſay, that *all prayer* does not intend family prayer, as well as that which is ſecret, and that which is public? And theſe duties are to be obſerved, not only for a ſeaſon; but we are required to *watch* thereunto with *all perſeverance*. Other paſſages might be mentioned to the ſame purpoſe; but I ſhall omit them, and haſten to obſerve,

5. And

† Gen. xii. 7, 8. and xiii. 18. and xxxiii. 20. and xxxv. 7.

5. And lastly, That this exercise is one character by which God's people are distinguished from all others. When the prophet *Jeremiah* would distinguish the *Heathen*, which knew not God, from his people, he marks them out by this, that they were *families* that *called not on God's name*. Jer. x. 25.— Here let none mistake, and think that an external observation of this duty is enough. Men may do that, and yet be in a miserable state: but it is with this, as it is with morality; though a person may have outward morality without saving grace, yet an immoral man is a wicked man: So here, they may pray in their families and closets too, whose hearts are not right with God; but prayerless families are called *heathen* families.

Thus I have touched upon some of the evidences from scripture, that we have for this practice, which are so plain, that it may well seem strange that any, who hold to the scriptures, should neglect it; but since many do, I shall proceed,

III. To labour to remove some hinderances that seem to lie in the way of this duty. And,

First, I have known some who would allow that family prayer was a good custom enough, but denied there being any command for it. But if Christ has required us to come with the language of *Our father*,——to ask that he would give us *this day our daily bread*, which so strongly implies that we should come thus *every day*; and if we are commanded to offer the sacrifice of praise to God *continually*, which word is so often used for the morning and evening sacrifice; and if *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, practiced calling on the name of the Lord, wherever their

families

families dwelt; if *David*, and alſo Chriſt himſelf did the like; are we commanded to pray *alway*, with *all prayer*, and are huſbands and wives required to walk ſo together that their prayers may not be hindered; and have we ſo many precepts and examples for this exerciſe at meal-times; and are ſuch called heathen families, that call not on God's name, (as has been proved above) what would mortals deſire more to prove to them that God requires them thus to practice? Should any (to evade the force of this reaſoning) ſay, That theſe prieſts, altars and ſacrifices that have been ſo often mentioned, refer to old *Jewiſh* ceremonies, that have been long out of date: In reply, I would deſire to aſk ſuch perſons a few queſtions.——Were not thoſe ancient ceremonies of God's appointment? And had he not ſome wiſe deſign therein? Were they not ſhadows of good things to come? Yea, and were they not a part of the ſcriptures that were written for *our learning*? Where is the chriſtian that dare deny theſe things? Surely then, inſtead of diſregarding of them, we ought to give the *more earneſt heed* to theſe things which were firſt repreſented by ſuch lively figures, and that have been ſo clearly explained to us in the new-teſtament. But,

I ſhall come, ſecondly, to that which I take to be the greateſt hinderance of this duty, and that is, *the want of a frame and inclination for it*. "Prayer (ſay many) ſhould be heart exerciſe, and when the *Iſraelites hearts were not right with God*, their prayers were looked upon as *flatteries* and *lies*." Pſal. lxxviii. 36, 37. But is it not ſtrange that thoſe ſinners *crimes* are now brought for others *excuſe*? They *refuſed to walk in* God's *law*; and inſtead of taking a thankful notice

tice of his dealings, they *forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them.* Ver. 10, 11. And instead of seeking to him for their food, they rather questioned whether he was able to supply them or not: they said, *Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?* ver. 19. And when he had given them abundant evidence of his power and goodness, and also some awful rebukes for their wickedness; yet, *for all this, they sinned still: and believed not for all his wondrous works.* Ver. 32. They stood it out 'till death stared them in the face, and then they would pray. *When he slew them, then they sought him.* Ver. 34. This is the old way that wicked men have trodden. And, O soul, dost thou chuse their path! They, it seems, would not mock God while they thought they could do without him: no, then they *turned their back unto him, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble, they will say, Arise and save us!* Jer. ii. 27.

One dreadful ingredient in this excuse, is making our own inclination, instead of the divine precept, our rule: for though the command is to *pray always with all prayer*, yet the import of this objection is, "Because I have not an inclination to such exercises, therefore I am excused from regarding or them." Horrid excuse with a witness! Yet horrid as it is, a great deal of pains has been taken to dress it up, so that its odiousness may not appear. Some will plead that saints are called to liberty; but that to pray when they have not freedom of mind for it, would be to work under a yoke of bondage: but such greatly mistake the nature of the saints liberty, a great part of which, is their open access to the Father, through Jesus Christ, in all their wants. Eph. ii. 18.

ii. 18. Heb. iv. 16. *David* cries out, *O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come. Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.* Psal. lxv. 2, 3. Here note well, that what many bring as an excuse to keep away, he takes as an errand to come upon: q. d. 'I find 'rising corruptions, and wrong dispositions to be too 'strong for me; therefore I come to thee, who art 'able and ready, both to pardon, and also to subdue 'them all.' ‡ Our Saviour often bids us *watch* and *pray* that we enter not into temptation: but this excuse would rather teach us to yield to temptation, even when we are *drawn away of our own lusts, and enticed.*† Little do many see where this would lead them to.*

Others will plead that this insisting upon daily prayer, will build people up upon works. But to this, it may be replied, that though there is a great propensity in mankind, like the Pharisee, to bring in an account of what they have done; and like the Jews of old, to think to *exact* of God, pay for all their *labour*; ‖ yet the true nature of prayer, is directly

‡ See also Micah vii. 19. & 1 Joh. i 9. † Jam. i. 14.

* I once met with a man who soon began to talk of the great liberty that he said saints were coming into, and not to go on in such bondage as they used to do, that they must pray in their families night and morning, let them feel how they would: but said he, 'When I get up in the morning, if I feel a spirit of prayer, I will pray in my family; 'if not, God does not call me to pray then, &c.' and so spake much about *liberty*, which soon brought to my mind that passage in 2 Pet. ii 19. And it was not long after, before that *liberty* lead him into base company, and to swear, cheat and lie, and he became one of the worst of men.

‖ Luk. xviii. Isai. lvii. 3.

rectly contrary to any such thing. Prayer is for a needy creature to come to God for what it wants, and thank him for what it receives: and surely there is a great difference between a guilty or miserable creature that comes to *beg* for pardon and help, and a merchant that comes with his goods to *trade* for more. The *beggar*, the more destitute he finds himself, the more earnest and incessant are his cries: but the *trader*, if his goods fail, he draws off 'till he can get more. And *Mary* says, that the Lord *hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away*. Luk. i. 53. Hence it appears that this very plea springs from a proud, self-righteous disposition. It implies as much as this, that if I feel in a good frame of mind, and have something that is good to bring, then I will come, and if not, I will stay away. David once got into such a frame that he *kept silence*, 'till God's hand was so heavy upon him that he could hold in no longer; then he confessed his transgressions, and the Lord forgave his sins: and he adds, *for this shall every one that is godly, pray unto him*. Psal. xxxii. 3—6. But least any should imagine that this was the right way to hold in 'till they were thus overpowered, he proceeds to say, *I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye: be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle*, ver. 8, 9. Which plainly shews that this keeping *silence*, and holding back 'till we are overcome, is acting more like stupid beasts, than like rational souls, who have a father in heaven, who is able and ready to supply all our wants. The regard that he shews to the prayer of the destitute, and

to the cry of the publican, may well encourage needy creatures to come to him. Pſal. cii. 17. Luk. xviii. 13, 14.

A juſt view of our ſtanding before God, and of our obligations to him, would ſilence a thouſand ſuch objections: for we cannot *live*, *move*, nor draw a *breath* without him, whether we acknowledge it or not; and *all things are naked, and opened unto* his *eyes*.* He ſees when we turn to him, *the back and not the face*, and takes notice of ſuch as *will not frame their doings to turn unto* him, who yet *in their* affliction *will ſeek* him *early*, and in their trouble will ſay, *Ariſe and ſave us*.‡ How ſoon would a juſt ſight of this, make any ſoul cry out, *God be merciful to me a ſinner*! And if he grants pardon, or a diſpoſition and ability to perform any duty aright, as all is received *from* God, ſo we owe all *to* him, and are ſtill deeper involved in the debt of love by all that we thus receive or do: what then have we to boaſt of, or truſt in of our own? Theſe things are ſet in a very moving light in the behaviour of that pious king that we have often had recourſe to before. When he had made vaſt preparations for the temple of God, out of his *own proper goods*, and had moved the elders of *Iſrael* to do the like, ſo that they had collected as much gold and ſilver as is computed at about thirty million ſterling,§ beſides other materials; yea, and had done it joyfully and willingly too: yet, at what a diſtance he was from thinking that God was indebted to him for all this, you may ſee in his language before a great aſſembly of people. 'Thine, 'ſays he, O Lord, is the greatneſs, and the power, 'and

* Heb. iv. 13. ‡ Jer ii. 27. Hoſ. iv. 15.

§ See the margin of Canne bible, at the place.

'and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: 'for all that is in the heaven, and in the earth, is *thine*; 'thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and *thou* art exalted 'as head above all. Both riches and honour come 'of *thee*, and *thou* reignest over all, and in *thine* hand 'is power and might, and in *thine* hand it is to make 'great, and to give strength unto all. Now, there-'fore, our God, we thank *thee*, and praise *thy* glori-'ous name. But who am I, and what is my people, 'that we should be able to offer so willingly after 'this sort? For all things come of *thee*, and of *thine* 'own have we given *thee*. We are strangers before 'thee, and sojourners,——all this store that we have 'prepared,——cometh of *thine* hand, and is all *thine* 'own." 1 Chron. xxix. 11——16.

Here it might be worth while to compare this with the language of the proud king of *Babylon*, and proud *Pharisee* of *Jerusalem*; the first of which says, 'Is not this great *Babylon*, that I have built for the 'house of the kingdom, by the might of *my* power, 'and for the honour of *my* majesty?' And the o-ther prayer is, 'God I thank thee, that I am not as 'other men are,——I fast twice in the week, I give 'tithes of all that I possess.' Dan. iv. 30. Luk. xviii. 11, 12. Mark well the difference; one uses the ambitious pronouns *I* and *my*, three times, in a way that ascribes all temporal things to *self*, without the mention of God's name in the affair: the other, after just mentioning the divine name once, has the great *I* over as often with relation to his religious exercises; while this king of *Israel* out-does them both on the other hand, yea, more than double; for he makes use of the terms, *thine*, *thou*, *thee* and *thy*, no

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leſs than ſixteen times in this paſſage, in a ſenſe that aſcribes all his enjoyments and performances to God, both temporal and ſpiritual: yea he ſpeaks of it with thankful wonder, that they ſhould be *able* to offer ſo *willingly*, as well as that they ſhould be allowed to handle ſo many of their maſter's goods, and lay them at his feet; *for*, ſays he, *of thine own have we given thee.* This is a pattern worthy of our moſt conſtant regard. It is ignorance of God, and keeping at a diſtance from him, that promotes ſelf-righteous conceits, which all vaniſh when we come near to him. When *Job* had wandered from his God, he was greatly enſnared with a ſelf-juſtifying diſpoſition: when he was bro't near to him, he ſays, *I abhor myſelf, and repent in duſt and aſhes.* Job xlii. 6.

Other hinderances I ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak of in my addreſſes to ſeveral ſorts of perſons, to which I now proceed. And,

1. To heads of families who neglect the daily practice of family worſhip.

Dear Sirs, will you permit an unworthy inſtrument, to aſk you a few ſerious queſtions about this matter? As,

1. Is this neglect becauſe you ſee no warrant for this duty? If ſo, pray then review the caſe again, and in the fear of God, ſearch his word, and conſider well if there is not as plain evidence for it, both by precept and example, as there is for almoſt any point of chriſtian practice. And conſider alſo, if it is not our *reaſonable ſervice*, that we *ſhould ſeek the Lord*, and that daily, ſince it is *in him we live, move, and have our being*; ‡ yea, and whether ſuch as neglect it, don't

‡ Act. 27, 28.

don't act more absurdly than irrational animals: for we are told, that the *young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God:* and that, *He giveth to the beast his food, and the young ravens that cry.* Psal. civ. 21. and cxlvii. 9. Or,

2. Is your neglect owing to a want of a disposition to such exercises? Surely the thought of that might well alarm thy soul; *for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.* It is a great truth, that God is a spirit, and is to be worshiped spiritually; yet this truth is held in unrighteousness, while it is held as an excuse from our daily acknowledgements of his favours: *for* (says the apostle) *the invisible things of him from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power, and God-head; so that they are without excuse: because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, NEITHER WERE THANKFUL.* Rom. i. 18, 20, 21. And the following part of the chapter, shews, that *for this cause* they were given up to the most amazing blindness, and awful abominations that mortals ever knew. Or,

3. Dost thou alledge the ill behaviour of any that practice family prayer, as an excuse for thine neglect, as I have known some to do? Methinks thou wilt be ashamed, in open daily light, to stand in this one minute. Who ever acted more abominably about prayer, than the *Pharisees*? Yet how far was that from hindering the abundant practice of it by Christ and his followers?

4. Is this neglect caused by things being out of order in thy family? O then rest not without having

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ing thoſe diſorders rectified : for a family that will not admit of the worſhip of God in it, muſt be a dreadful place ; and one may juſtly ſay of it, as *Jacob* did of *Simeon* and *Levi*, *O my ſoul, come not thou into their ſecret : unto* ſuch a family, *mine honour be not thou united.* *Joſhua*'s reſolution with regard to himſelf and family, deſerves our warmeſt regard. *As for me and my houſe we will ſerve the Lord.* Joſh. xxiv. 15. Nor is *David*'s example leſs worthy of notice. When he ſet up houſe-keeping, inſtead of letting in vanity and iniquity as many do, he invites God home with him, ſaying, *O when wilt thou come unto me ? I will walk within my houſe with a perfect heart : I will ſet no wicked thing before mine eyes.* Pſal. ci. 2, 3. But doſt thou ſay, I have no gracious perſons in my houſe to join with me ? That is indeed a ſorrowful caſe ; yet, as our warrant for ſocial worſhip depends not on our certainly knowing that we have gracious ſouls preſent with us, and as all are God's creatures, who are under manifold obligations to acknowledge him, we may boldly come to the throne of grace, where the general aſſembly of the firſt born, which are written in heaven, all meet ; and may there preſent our praiſes and requeſts. Heb. iv. 16. and xii. 22—24.

5. Do any excuſe themſelves becauſe of the ſmallneſs of their gifts ? I would only aſk ſuch, whether that prevented them from coming in their childhood to their earthly parents for what they wanted ? if not, then why ſhould it hinder us from coming to him who knoweth what we have need of before we aſk him ? Mat. vi. 8.

Before I take my leave of you who profeſs religion, and yet neglect the daily practice of ſocial worſhip,

I would earneſtly deſire you to view the inconſiſtency that there is between your profeſſion and practice. It is generally allowed, that a leading point in the profeſſion of chriſtianity, is the ordinance of baptiſm, notwithſtanding men's different judgments about the time and manner of adminiſtering of it. And thoſe who hold to infant baptiſm, often bring this as a great argument therefor, viz. That their children will be *heathens* if they are not baptized: while ſome others can hardly look upon any to be *chriſtians* that have not been baptized by immerſion. Now, reader, art thou of either of theſe ſentiments, what conſiſtency can there be between thy profeſſion and thy conduct? If of the former, then how canſt thou prove that thy family are *chriſtians*, when they have the very badge of *heatheniſm* that the prophet diſtinguiſhes them by? And if thou art of the latter ſentiment, how can thy character be any better ſecured, while ſo important an article of chriſtian behaviour is neglected. Baptiſm is a *putting on Chriſt*, and contains an engagement to *walk in newneſs of life*. Rom. vi. 4. But if we think that one act, without living ſuch a life, will anſwer, ſhall find ourſelves greatly miſtaken. No doubt but thou wilt find that many outward difficulties, and inward ſtruggles will riſe againſt prayer, as well as other duties: but if you will neglect them becauſe of that, I leave you to anſwer it to him, who has ſaid, *Whoſoever doth not bear his croſs, and come after me, CANNOT be my diſciple.* Luk. xiv. 27.

II. I would ſay a few words to them that practice family worſhip: and my addreſs to you ſhall be by way of advice and exhortation. And,

1. Reſt

1. Reſt not in the mere external performances of this duty. *James* tells us that while many receive not, becauſe they aſk not; others aſk, and receive not, becauſe they aſk amiſs, that they may conſume itupon their luſts; and he ſays, *God reſiſteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.* And among other things which he advances on this ſubject, he brings in the example of *Elias*, who though a man of like paſſions with us, yet he prayed *earneſtly*, and he repeatedly obtained his requeſt. He prayed *earneſtly*, or as it is in the margin, *He prayed in his prayer.* Jam. iv. 2, 3, 6. and v. 17, 18. So, my friends, if we pray in our prayers, we ſhall find it not to be in vain.

2. Take good heed to your walk. Obedient children will come to their parents, not only for food, but for inſtruction about what they ſhould do, and will be as much concerned to obey their commands, as to obtain their help. So ſays our apoſtle, *As obedient children, not faſhioning yourſelves according to the former luſts* in *your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, ſo be ye holy in all manner of converſation.* And as many are ready to catch hold of any evil behaviour that they can diſcover in any who profeſs this, as well as other duties of religion, that they neglect, as an excuſe for them: So he tells us, it *is the will of God, that with well-doing, ye put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men.* 1 Pet. i. 14, 15. and ii. 15.

3. Content not thy ſelf with family prayer alone. We are to pray always with all prayer, and watch thereunto with all perſeverance. Therefore,

4. Beware of turning back from theſe ways; for if

if any man draw back, Chriſt's ſoul will have no pleaſure in him: which is ſet in a very ſtriking light in the 81ſt Pſalm, where God reminds his people of the wonders which he had done for them, and ſays, *Thou calledſt in trouble, and I delivered thee.* —— *Hear, O my people, and I will teſtify unto thee:* —— *There ſhall no ſtrange god be in thee; I am the Lord thy God:* —— *open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.* As if he had ſaid, 'Thou haſt found me to be a God hearing 'prayer, and I am ever the ſame; therefore regard 'no others, but open thy mouth wide, enlarge thy 'deſires to me as much as thou wilt, and I will fill 'them.' But inſtead of continuing their regard to him, he goes on to ſay, *my people would not hearken to my voice: and Iſrael would none of me; ſo I gave them up unto their own hearts luſts; and they walked in their own counſels.* v. 7, 12. O tremendous caſe! to be given up to one's hearts luſts is one of the greateſt judgments on this ſide of hell. What need have we then to cry daily, *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!*

My

III. Addreſs ſhall be to young perſons. And what I have at preſent to ſay to ſuch is, learn the importance of ſetting out, as well as travelling through the world with God. This was the way that the firſt man took who got to heaven without ſeeing death.* And this is the command of our divine Lord, *Seek ye* FIRST *the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs, and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.* Matth. vi. 33. To the ſame purpoſe is the language of *David*, to you; *Come*, ſays he, *ye children, hearken unto me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that deſireth life, and loveth many days, that he may ſee good?*

Depart

* Gen. v. 24.

Depart from evil, &c. Pſa. xxxiv. 11, 12. Take heed, dear youth! you are called upon from two very different quarters: Satan promiſes you the kingdoms and glories of this world, if you will take his ways of deceit, vanity, and iniquity: and on the other hand, here are theſe calls from heaven to chuſe the way of truth and holineſs, and the promiſe thereupon of all bleſſings, both in this life, and that which is to come: and which wilt thou believe? which wilt thou regard? As ſurely as God ſpeaks true, the way to enjoy *good days* here, is to walk in the way of truth, peace, and holineſs; and every ſoul which yields to the contrary inticements, practically declares, that God is a liar, and that the Devil is to be believed before him!—Be aſtoniſhed, O heavens, at this!——What conduct can be more abſurd, than for a creature, who wants to enjoy the good things of the Creator, to take a courſe of contrariety to him to obtain them? And, in particular, for one that wants an agreeable companion, and to get comfortably ſettled in the world, to give himſelf up to vanity and iniquity then, even more than at other times. *Solomon* ſays, *A prudent wife is from the Lord.* Prov. xix. 14. How then can any expect to obtain ſuch an one in a way of diſregard to him?* Thoſe who take ſuch a courſe, do what they can, as it were, to conſtrain the Divine Being to *hedge up their way with thorns*; and ſtrip them of their enjoyments, in order to

* This matter is ſet in a clear and ingenious light, in a little tract, entitled, *The advantages and diſadvantages of the marriage ſtate, as entered into with religious or irreligious perſons; repreſented under the ſimilitude of a dream.* By Mr. *John Johnſon.* Which has been printed both at *London* and *Boſton.*

to bring them to a right ſenſe of things. Hoſ. ii. 6——15. Or elſe to let them have the *waters of a full cup*, and an *increaſe in riches*, for a little ſpace, until they *ſlip into deſtruction in a moment*, and are *conſumed with terrors*. Pſal. lxxiii. 10, 12, 18, 19. You would pity a ſlave, or criminal, that was obliged to labour all day to collect a *bed of thorns* to lie down upon it at night; or to gather a large quantity of *fuel* for *his own burning*: Yet this is the ſinner's own choice; whilſt he hardens his heart againſt God, and abuſeth his goodneſs, he is ſpending his life in *treaſuring up wrath againſt the day of wrath*. Rom. ii. 4, 5. O! how different from this, is the caſe of an old grey-headed ſaint, who can appeal to God that he has been his *truſt from his youth*, and that he has gone in his ſtrength, and truſted in his righteouſneſs only. Pſal. lxxi. 5, 16, 18. And can ſay, when the time of his departure is at hand, 'I have fought a 'good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe.---Hence-'forth there is laid up for me a crown of righteouſ-'neſs, which the Lord the righteous judge ſhall give 'me in that day.' 2 Tim. iv. 6—8. This is a happineſs worth ſtriving for indeed!

And as every ſoul is purſuing after happineſs, tho' moſt of the children of men take the way that leads directly from it; therefore take a brief deſcription of a truly happy man, in the following lines, with which I ſhall conclude.

THE

I.

THE happy man is born of God ;
A penitent indeed :
His ſoul is waſh'd in Jeſus' blood,
And follows him with ſpeed.

II.

His mind is taught by truth divine,
His will is rul'd thereby ;
And his affections therewith join
In ſweeteſt harmony.

III.

Chriſt's yoke upon his neck he wears ;
He yields his all to God :
This empty world, with all its cares,
Under his feet are trod:

IV.

His father's precepts he obeys,
Still with a ready mind ;
And unto all his ſov'reign ways
Lies chearfully reſign'd.

V.

His morning and his evening cries,
Come up before the throne,
Perfum'd with Jeſus' ſacrifice,
In whom he truſts alone.

The

VI.

The great concern upon his mind
Is how to honour God;
And for to benefit mankind,
Upon this earthly clod.

VII.

This is the end for which he lives;
All other things look vain:
This is the prize for which he ſtrives,
While life or breath remain.

VIII.

Humility his ſoul doth cloath,
Contentment fills his mind;
And he within his heart doth loath
All ſin of every kind.

IX.

His tho'ts do often mount the ſky,
And view the world above:
He ſees the glorious bridegroom nigh,
Which fires his heart with love.

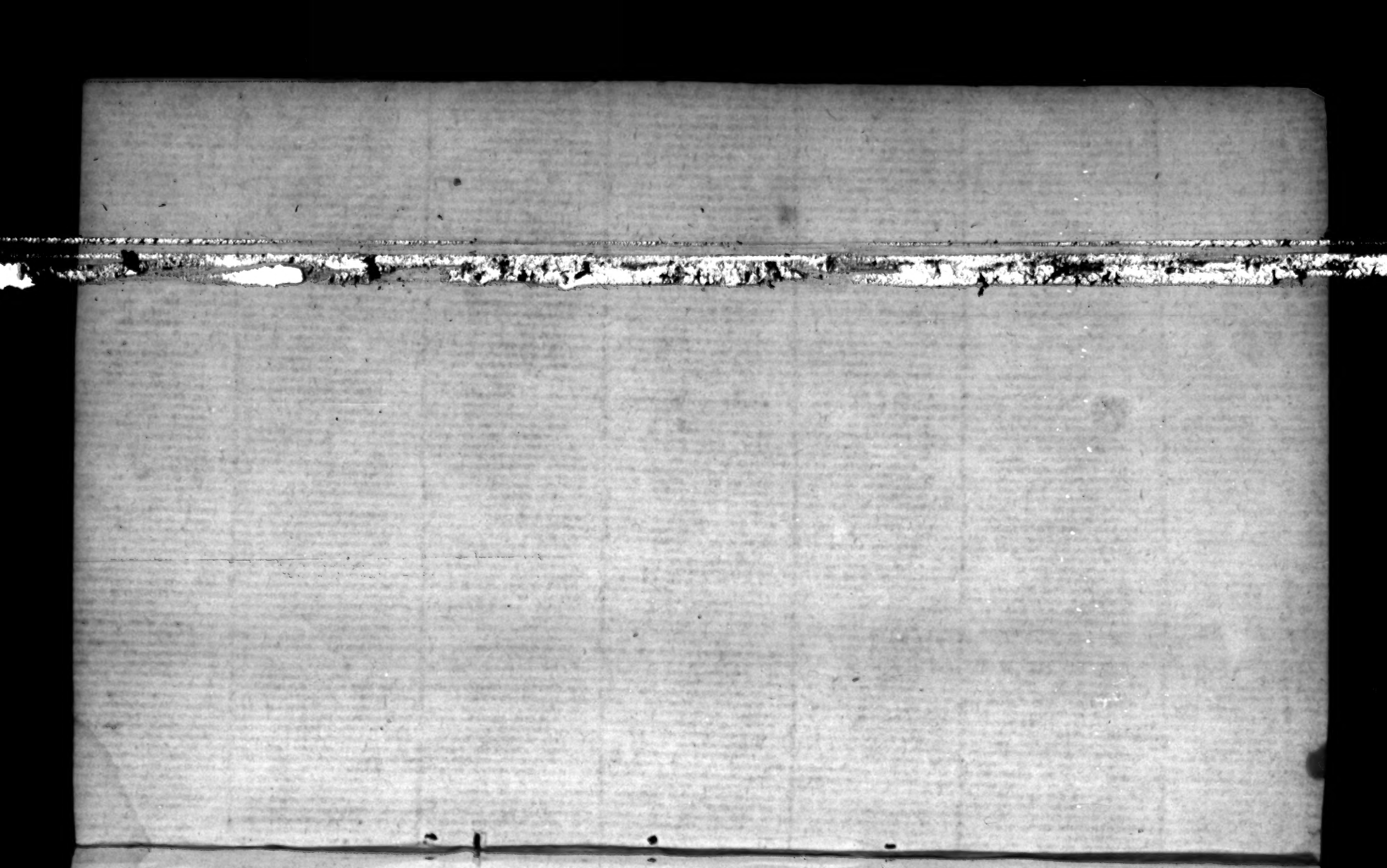
X.

God is his portion and his guide
Thro' this dark wilderneſs;
And when this fleſh is laid aſide,
His ſoul has endleſs reſt.

XI.

And when the judge ſhall from his throne
Paſs ſentence upon all,
He'll riſe to dwell with th' HOLY ONE,
Free from all ſin and thrall.

XII.

O Lord of hoſts, unto my ſoul
Much of *this* pleaſure grant!
This is the *all*; *this* is the *whole*;
What elſe then can I want!

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